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NOTES ON *J. Q. R.*, XVIII, 399 ff.

THE letter with which Mr. Cowley happily inaugurates his publications from Bodleian Geniza Fragments in the last issue of the *J. Q. R.* offers many points of interest. We must be especially thankful to the editor for his self-denial in publishing this text without waiting for time to give a full commentary on his "find."

As in many fragments from the Geniza, the beginning and with it the names of its writer and the person to whom it is directed are missing, but the indications given with regard to the latter may perhaps enable us to guess at his identity. He lived in Spain (fol. 40 a), had a very prominent position, is referred to twice as leader of his time (ibid.)<sup>1</sup>. A command is ascribed to him (fol. 39 b)<sup>2</sup>. He further on took great interest in scholars and supported them (fol. 40 a), and had previously twice sent money to the academy (fol. 41 b). As the letter is dated 953, all these statements would fit the great Spanish statesman of this time, Hasdai ben Isaac ibn Shaprut, who encouraged so greatly the beginnings of Jewish scholarship in Spain, and also contributed to the Babylonian academies<sup>3</sup>. It is therefore probable that this letter was directed to him.

The writer of the letter must have been either a Gaon or at least an Ab-Beth-Din, as can be concluded from his complaint that he had himself to travel through the judicial districts belonging to the academy, whereas in earlier times he used to send prominent members of his academy, giving them authorization to act as judges (fol. 42 a). He also asks to have the money sent to him personally (fol. 43 a)<sup>4</sup>, and that legal questions should be directed to him

<sup>1</sup> ואשרי הדור שאחז פרנסו שאחז יודע חכמים וחלמידיהם מזהין הם מחפרננין is an allusion to *Berakot*, 28 a.

<sup>2</sup> וימשך ממשלחך ויחצר בממשלה הראשונה means: 'he prolongs thy command so that it reaches the Messianic time.' Cf. Targum on Micah iv. 8.

<sup>3</sup> That we only know about his relations to Sura, whence he bought copies of the Talmud (Dunash ben Labrat's dedication of his criticism of Menahem, verse 35) is probably only on account of the scarcity of our sources. It is unknown whether Dosa ben Saadia, when he sent him a biography of Saadia (הקבלה, כ', ed. Neubauer, p. 66) lived in Sura.

<sup>4</sup> וחוכרי ברבה רחבה בשמי Half a century later Samuel ben Hofni warns Josef ben Berakhya—the scholar from Kairuan who had the title סגן הישיבה—not to listen to those who write to him: "Send the offerings

personally (fol. 49 a). It is unlikely that any other member of the academy, except the Gaon or the Ab-Beth-Din, would write in such terms.

In spite of all the information he gives as to his ancestor, his name cannot be ascertained from the sources accessible to us, so far as I am aware. The Gaon of this time, Aaron ben Josef Sargado, is out of question, as Sherira (ed. Neubauer, p. 40 f.), expressly states that he was not a descendant of any of the Geonic families. Nor can the Ab-Beth-Din Amram bar Meshue, or the anti-Gaon Nehemiah bar Cohen-Zedek be identified with the writer, as the names of their fathers are given (fol. 41 a) without any epithet. We only learn that the writer was the grandson of the Ab-Beth-Din (אב ישיבה) Tob, otherwise unknown, who was the son of Zemaḥ ben Palṭoi and brother of Sherira's grandmother and of Moses, a brother of Naḥshon ben Zadoḳ. It is interesting to note that both Sherira's grandfathers, paternal and maternal—viz. Jehuda and Meshue—were secretaries of the Gaon Zemaḥ (שער אדוננו צמח), fol. 41 a).

The name of a new Exilarch occurs here, that of Solomon (fol. 41 b). He is probably the grandson of David ben Zaccai, who after his father's death, c. 941, was educated by Saadia. He was twelve in 941, and therefore was about twenty-two years old when his intercession saved part of the money for the academy in 951.

It would be extremely interesting to know more about the person who tried to steal the money sent to the academy from Spain, but was partly checked by the Exilarch. He appears to have tried again in vain two years later to take away the contributions sent from the same country through pious and righteous brothers, Aaron and Moses, sons of Abraham ben Aaron, who are stated to have been rich men of business (fol. 41 b). Was the alleged robbery perhaps merely the attempt of another faction of the academy to divert the funds?

Our letter gives us some new information about the conditions of the academies during the latter part of the Geonic period, but generally agrees with information already gained from other Geniza discoveries<sup>1</sup>. We see that in the middle of the tenth century, when the Sura academy, soon after Saadia's death, altogether disappeared, that of Pumpadita was in very precarious circumstances from lack of means. The regular income from the districts of Babylonia<sup>2</sup> had

in my name" (*J. Q. R.*, XIV, 308). This passage is therefore no absolute proof that the writer of our text held the dignity of Gaon.

<sup>1</sup> Schechter's *Saadyana*, Nos. XLV and XLVI, and G. Margoliouth, *J. Q. R.*, XIV, 308-9, which relate to a little later period.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with reference to these districts, Neubauer, *Chronicles*, II: 80 f.

been very much diminished, owing to the country having been devastated; it had lost its money and landed property, and, the writer complains, nothing was left to them but the writings of their forefathers. Thus, the contributions from abroad were the only source of income of the academy. We do not find in this letter, as in those of later times (see the passages quoted above), an allusion to new centres of learning which took away this last support from the academies. The decentralization had clearly not yet begun. Disunion reigned in the academy (fol. 42 a), though our writer does not give any details; these can partly be gathered from Sherira (p. 41).

The most important fact we learn from the letter is with regard to the relations between Spain and Babylonia. The hypothesis<sup>1</sup>, that questions from Spain were generally directed to Sura only, is refuted by the new text. Of course, Naṭronai's well-known responsum on the order of the **ברכות** found in a Geniza MS. by Dr. Ginzberg, who publishes the text in the present issue of the *J. Q. R.*, as well as the Siddur of Amram<sup>2</sup>, were sent to Spain from Sura, and from our letter we learn that Zadok and Nahshon<sup>3</sup> also sent responsa to Spain from Sura. But on the other hand, we now know that Palṭoi, Zemaḥ, Jehuda, Cohen-Zedek and Tob and Meshue, all of Pumpadita, were in regular communication with Spain. The well-known statement of the **העתיים** ס', p. 267, that the exilarch Naṭronai ben Ḥaninai, when exiled from Babylonia in 773, wrote the Talmud down for the Spanish Jews from memory becomes very doubtful since we read here that Palṭoi (842-58) sent them a copy of the Talmud with explanations, and that his son Zemaḥ had a very lively correspondence upon difficult passages. The writer of our letter was in possession of all these letters and his information on these points is, therefore, authentic. We have here the earliest mention of collections of Geonic responsa—arranged probably according to authors.

Finally, attention may be called to two minor points in the letter, the peculiar legend that the Palestinians advised Alexander to go to Spain and consult the great Jewish scholars of that country on the way to heaven (fol. 40 a), and the text of the **עשר מילי דהסידותא**<sup>4</sup> with the peculiar reading **רבינו רב** (fol. 43 a), for which *Berakot*, 22 a and 38 b, where **רב** is called **רבינו**, may be compared.

<sup>1</sup> J. Müller, **מסעדה לחשיבות הגאונים**, p. 143, note 13; Büchler, *R. É. J.*, L, 160.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also the Geonic Responsa, ed. Lyck, No. 56.

<sup>3</sup> A responsum of his to Spain is mentioned by Aaron ben Joseph ibn Sargado in **פירוש**, ed. Constantinople, fol. 26 d.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. **האורה** ס', ed. Buber, p. 1 f., where all the variations from other sources are given.

The letter of Samuel ben Ḥofni which follows the anonymous one mentioned above, gives his genealogy (previously given by Harkavy, זכרון לראשונים, III, 1), calling his great-grandfather נניר נזר הישיבה. It is directed to Fez and therefore suggests the reading חשובה לר"ש in עטור, ed. Lemberg, II, 26 c, instead of the unintelligible חכם מחסיא, which Harkavy proposes to correct (loc. cit., p. 10, note 5), and J. Müller (loc. cit., p. 169, note 5) וחכם פאם.

The most interesting point in this fragment is the very full list of dignitaries of the academies (fol. 45 a), among which the אב"ד is missing. Perhaps we ought to read [יש' [ומן] ממונו ומן [אב]. The titles mentioned are סופר הישיבה (which does not occur to my knowledge elsewhere), the heads of the סדרים (who elsewhere occur only outside of Babylonia, cf. Ginzberg, *J. Q. R.*, XVIII, 425), of מדרשים (cf. Halberstam, *ישורון*, V, 139), פרקים (cf. Halberstam, loc. cit., 137 f.), and סיעות, אלופים, חכמים, and בני הנאונים (the last a very peculiar classification), שופטים (mostly in Babylonia they have the title דיין), תנאים (cf. on this title in Talmudical and post-Talmudical times, Krochmal, *מורה נבוכי הזמן*, Lemberg, 1851, p. 197 f.; Löw, *Graph. Requisiten*, II, 129; Friedmann, *מכילתא*, p. xlii, Lewy, *Abba Saul*, 8 f.; Halberstam, *ישורון*, V, 140; Halevy, *דורות הראשונים*, III, 5 f. note), תלמידים, and סופרים. It would seem that after the re-establishment of the academy at Sura many new titles were created. The letter was probably written during the early part of Samuel ben Ḥofni's Gaonate, before he had the difficulties of which he complains in *J. Q. R.*, XIV, 303.

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